

International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender  
Studies (LALIGENS), Bahir Dar- Ethiopia

Vol. 5 (2), Serial No 12, October, 2016: 112-124  
ISSN: 2225-8604(Print) ISSN 2227-5460 (Online)  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/laligens.v5i2.10>

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MASCULINITY IN EARLY AFRICAN TIMES:  
TRANSFORMATIONAL PRESENTATIONS IN ACHEBE'S  
*THINGS FALL APART*

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ABSTRACT

The paper considered the concept of masculinity in relation to traditional African gender relations. The paper argued that colonial imposed definitions of patriarchy and matriarchy were designed to create hierarchy within the African society which did not exist before. Through the works of various African scholars, the paper took another look at gender relations in order to show how these relations define masculinity. Based on this, the paper went on to use that framework to analyse Chinua Achebe's representation of various masculine forms. Through the eyes of Achebe's men, the paper highlighted some of the variables responsible for the restructuring of the African masculinity and ultimately gender relations in Africa.

**Key Words:** Africa; masculinity; matriarchy; violence; culture

INTRODUCTION: AIM AND CONTEXT

Things fell apart politically, economically, socially, and physically in Africa when the bonds of African values that tied people together could no longer hold. Whether one has hope in the future of Africa free from wars or of perpetual wars, the problem is still there to solve: it is said to lie in gender-based violence. Perhaps it helps

to start by distinguishing masculinity in Africa from masculinity elsewhere. Throughout decades the significance of black masculinity has always been measured by comparing it to the West, by the myth of African patriarchy, by the predominance of physical strength to the exclusion of intellectual capabilities, and, finally, by political conflicts and atrocities that emerge as a result. 'Gender and violence' is a current so strong in Social science that it can be said to have taken on the character of a huge prejudice especially when dealing with men in Africa. In other words, the theory of gender-based-violence seems progressive, but not when it focuses on the effects of violence, for it fails to address the root causes of violence. That it would be wrong to dismiss the study of men as presented so far so abruptly is unfair, however, I intend to explore the postcolonial form of black masculinity in the novel, *Things Fall Apart* by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. I allow the precolonial masculinity in Achebe's book speak in this paper as a way of resisting views by the critics that confine the measurement of masculinity in Africa to one period-post-coloniality- that has been thoroughly influenced by features predominantly Western, thus, presenting the world a stereotypical Africa that never existed before. This paper aims, not so much at critiquing Western stereotypes towards black masculinity rippled by violence, as it is to try and establish its link with the precolonial Africa in order to highlight the need to restructure masculinity today.

#### A. IMAGE OF MASCULINITY BY THE WEST

The black man's image is distorted not so much by racist stereotypes alone as by the narrow frameworks by which black masculinity is constructed and studied in Social science and for which it is our task to reverse as will be shown in the next section. With most critics still having their eyes on studies by early ethnographers and missionaries, masculinity in Africa shrinks into what is barbaric and exotic: "black men" it was said then to, "have a higher sexual drive than white men and could pose a danger to white women" (Hoschild, 1998, p. 210). The object of such interpretation remains the reading of most colonial myths as it is of the discourse of rape today often grasped as being motivated by this high sexual drive. It is often believed that the black man is sexually deranged. To take the most dramatic example of such imaginary, the black male sexual organ is often claimed a threat to white women and such images are often used to destroy trust between races and discourage interracial marriages. Whereas the above visual analysis or description of the black masculine physique construe the symbolic enactment of the abnormal, it appears hierarchical in other representations which open masculinities to binary opposition between civilised and non-civilised or human and non-human. The British colonial military, Robert Baden-Powel, is a good example of such fantasies. He remarks: "The stupid inertness of the puzzled Negro is duller than that of an ox; a dog would grasp your meaning in one half the time. 'Men and brother'! They may be brothers, but they certainly are not men (in Uchendu, 2008, p.1). The language is as strong as Joseph Conrad's. In his *Heart of Darkness* Conrad is

equally aggressive: “[...] It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it- this suspicion of their not being inhuman” (Conrad, 2002, p.52). One can scarcely exaggerate naivety of most readers in accepting racist comments such as these as true narratives about man in Africa in their most literal sense. But Western scholars brave enough to rewrite such narratives only reduced the aggressive tone but still submitted themselves to other colonial clichés of black man’s infantile mind. Describing man in South Africa, Jan Smuts, moves towards a brighter view but only slowly away from the stereotypes by his predecessors granting this man a sort of experience locked in childhood. “The African, Smuts wrote, “is a special human type” with “some wonderful characteristics” (Mamdani, 1996, p.4), “It has largely remained a child type, with a child psychology and outlook” (p.4). And when he praises him, it only comes to something like this: “A child-like human cannot be a bad human, for are we not in spiritual matters bidden to be like unto little children?” (4). Onoge (1977) also refers to the study by James Richie’s *The African as suckling and as adult* and James Carothers’s *The African mind in health and sickness* which trace the origin of this infantilism in the patriarchy by which man in Africa is believed to have been ruled as he remained very little touched by Western civilisation. The representation of masculinity in Africa feeds on a lot of myths in the view to exaggerate the differences between races and these myths unfortunately constituted the narrative of ‘black masculinity’ till this day. Critics would certainly question such myths but the sensory deception by the atrocities of recent wars in Africa once again reinstate them.

#### B. CHEIKH ANTA DIOP’S RESPONSE TO WESTERN PORTRAYAL OF GENDER

Perhaps it is important to ask: What kind of masculinity does Africa bring to the world history? A few decades ago the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop stated his doctoral research whose ideas are partly captured in his book, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and of Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity* which was published after his death in 1986. His contribution to humanities presented a different perspective of gender in Africa, a direction that was sharply different. Diop challenged erroneous classic writers such as Morgan and Bachofen who had presented what they referred to as a hierarchy of social systems which distinguished between the matrilinearity and matriarchy of the ‘barbarian peoples’ of Africa from the patriarchy and monogamy of ‘civilised’ Greece and Rome. In her introduction to Diop’s book, under scrutiny, Ifi Amadiume, herself author of *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations: The Igbo Case* (1987) and *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987), shows how Diop had first to compare the North and South cultures. He did so by contrasting them on the basis of the status of women, systems of inheritance, dowry and kinship affiliation and then dismissing the Western patriarchal system as nothing but an exercise of power of discrimination of women. Diop argues

that “the Northern Indo-European cultures denied women their rights and subjugated them under the private institution of the patriarchal family” (Diop, 1987, p. xii). These points presented a contrasting view which further suggests that, the African matriarchal culture was not barbaric; the opposite could be true. If anything, it was a system of sound values that the American and Greek scholars unnecessary misrepresented. The African system of matrilinearity and matriarchy represented the more advanced culture whose distinctiveness the Western scholars buried than they should have done. The question that this brings to bear is why prominent scholars such as Morgan and Bachofen gave false representations? Perhaps Montaigne was right when he said that “each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice” (Copenhaver, et al; 1992, p. 259). Diop confronts the classic writers on a number of points which, in turn, point to the maddeningly disorganised Western patriarchy than they were themselves honest enough to admit when dealing with their reality. For Diop, considering its organisation, argues that the African culture was “typified by the agricultural and burial systems.... Wives were mistresses of the houses and keepers of the food. Women were agriculturalists, men were hunters. The woman’s power was based on her important economic role” (Diop, 1987, p. xiii).

The division of labour has often restricted gender researchers to argue for man/woman divide. Caution, however, should be taken against confusing “matriarchy” for “an absolute and cynical triumph of woman over man”; for, Diop matriarchy “was a harmonious dualism, an association accepted by both sexes”; he claims that it offered Africa “a society where each and every one could fully develop by following the activity best suited to his physiological nature” (Diop, 1987, p.108). Following his arguments, this was artificial antagonism because the social character of gender was such that society benefitted both from men as it did from women and women were capable of doing some of the things men did. The grounds on which men and women differed, as I shall argue, were age or seniority. The overemphasis on the notion of hierarchy restrict our understanding of the duality of gender in Africa, of the social context within which people produced their gender identities in ways less impeded by inequalities but more suited to freedom and parity. To put it somehow succinctly, society did not see biological difference as a barrier at all, it is what one wanted to do in society which mattered the most. The system was equally characterised by the strong ties between brother and sister. Even in the marriage, where a woman travelled out, this bond was not completely severed. Most of the funeral rules prescribed the return of a wife’s corpse to her natal home” (Diop, 1987, p. xiii). After contrasting one system with the other, the scholar went on to provide a general history of both cradles and their areas of influence in order to show how advanced African system was; and the best evidence that the system was progressive is the prominence of African Queens. “African women were already Queens and warriors [the Ahosi in Dahomey], participating in public life and politics, while their Indo-European contemporaries were

still subordinated and subjugated under the patriarchal family” (Diop, 1987, p. xiii). Perhaps the most striking image of the abused European woman is in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1972) where she explores European myths which expose the condition of the European woman both in her patriarchal times and contemporary conditions. The failure of this woman to take place of human dignity as a free and independent person next to man is shown as extremely limited throughout the whole book. Unlike her Western counterpart whose role was confined to the kitchen, the image of the woman in Africa was one of freedom; she was associated with men on professional equality, if she wished, and was found exerting influence upon man as a priestess, mistress, king’s body guard, and, even warrior, without being restricted.

Among the Luba people of Kasai region in Congo, for example, ‘a married woman’ is called *muadialumbanza* (‘mistress of the house’ or ‘keeper of the homestead’), a title given her by her husband and community to honour her as a ‘giver and sustainer of life’, a ‘provider’; features that, in no way, make her inferior to man who, in fact, values her. Amadiume equally reminds us of Southern matriarchal system which was “marked by sacredness of the mother and her unlimited authority” and that there is a “spirit of common motherhood, generally symbolised in African religions. In Igbo, it is *Oma, Umunne, Ibenne*” (in Diop, 1989, p. xiii). As these concepts suggest, “it is the mother that gives her children and society in general the gift of the pot of prosperity which in Igbo is called *ite uba*” (p. xiii). “The mother” Amadiume further argues, “also gives the pot of secrets/mystery/magic/sacred knowledge/spiritual power” (xiii) to her offspring. For her part, Oyenoke Oyewumi goes even further to exclude the notion of binary categories male/female/man/woman and it’s attending male privileges as perceived in the West. A Yoruba family, says she, “is organised on the principle of seniority, it is based on age and not gender per se, and the concepts *egbon*, says she, refers to the older sibling and *aburo* to the younger regardless of gender” (Oyewumi, 2002).

If the place of a woman is too visible enough for one to see it in this traditional African society, one can only imagine masculinity standing next to it not as a bare location of violence but as a space made of preferable images of peace, love, support, as part of principles that ruled that early world. To appreciate the scope, the work by the above scholars which fills in this critical gap between precolonial and postcolonial discussion on gender, one may only need to say that the African man was soft, he knew how to treat the woman in his social relations and development with her until his masculinity lost its form and value under the influence of Islam, Christianity and colonial nonsense.

### C.TO BE MAN IN ANCIENT AFRICA

In this section I take a firm stance against the warrior tradition by which man in Africa continues to be defined. I remind my reader that although sometimes

associated with army training, age-grades, age-sets and initiation rites played an important role in shaping the social character of gender in society which was more important to Africans than hegemony.

Taking the Gikuyu people of Kenya as an example, the point of entry into community or the recognition of manhood and the full right of citizenship or membership was marked by circumcision. It is by this ceremony associated with circumcision that it was conferred upon the young boy (or girl) his/her "full rights of citizenship, including the right to be warrior" according to Dent Ocaya-Lakidi (in Mazrui, 1977, p.138). Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* refers to this as the most drastic step as he writes: "This used to be done only when the youth could be expected to prove himself as warrior. The customary age was thus eighteen or twenty". He cites Father Buger, who remarks that "the uncircumcised, *kekee*, has no rights of possession. He cannot build a homestead of his own. In the days of tribal wars, he could not go to the battle-field; he could only stay at home with the women and defend the homestead. He cannot boast or brag or even appear to do so" (1938, p.107). Following Kenyatta (1938, pp.198-9), this boy was before the ceremony considered a mere child with no responsibility in the tribal organisation. If he committed any crime, it was the duty of his parents to answer for him. Now that he is circumcised, he is a "full grown" and is given the title of *mando-morome* (a he-man), able to share responsibility with "he-men" (*arome*). He entitled to join the national council of junior warriors called *njama ya anake a mumo*. He is provided with weapons such as spear, shield, and sword. Kenyatta goes on to consider other steps of age-grades among which he includes the *njama ya ita* (war council). This is the second stage in warriorhood celebrated about 82 moons or 12 rain seasons following the circumcision. After paying the initiation fee, the junior warrior is promoted to the council of senior warriors.

It is clear from the Gikuyu account that we may expect to find two broad categories of warriors that will culminate in eldership. Kenyatta (1938, p. 200) also explained how from the governmental point of view the whole of the warrior class, composed of several age-groups, was divided into two sections, from which the two councils of seniors and junior warriors were formed. The warrior groups had the task to elect its village, district or national leaders: the *athamaki a riika* who, in Kenyatta's words, played the role of spokespersons in all matters pertaining to the welfares of the group and the tribe. It is precisely from these leaders that judges and elders were chosen, especially those who have shown bravery in wars, impartiality in justice and discipline. But while the previous stages were reserved for unmarried men, the third stage in manhood is marriage. It is only when you are married that you can join the council of elders referred to as the *kiama*. What is meant thereby is a journey of manhood: going from *kiama gia kamatino* (carrier of spear) to the *kiama kia mataathi* (council of peace reached when a man has a son or a daughter of old age to be circumcised) where you are invested with a staff of office (*mothegi*) together with a

bunch of sacred leaves (*motaathi*) signifying that you have really become a *peaceful man* or *peace maker* in the community till the last and most honoured status of a Gikuyu man's life, the *kiama kia maturanguru* (religious and sacrificial council) having passed through all the age-grades (see Kenyatta, 1938, pp.202-204). It is worth noting here that among the Gikuyu, as Ocaya-Lakidi observes, "the former warrior-now-chief could not attain the highest or absolute political power" (Ocaya-Lakidi in Mazrui, 1977, p.141). Such a power was, according to Southwold that Ocaya-Lakidi cites, reserved for the so-called *princes of the drum*, known as immediate male offspring's brothers and sons of brothers of the king. We see the Gikuyu as introducing a new principle of civilian power whereby the army (warriors) is excluded from political leadership. But in general, what is known about the Gikuyu is that "success to military was one way to political power" (p.141). As one may gather, the construction of manhood is gradual and age or seniority, to be precise, has to be seen as a determining factor of man's role in society, not brutality or violence. By tracing masculinity through institutions where it is located, its different forms manifest themselves not in terms of hegemony but complementarities. Scholars start understanding that masculinity in Africa has to be examined within the context of the institutions that shaped it as Uchendu comments on the Zulu case below,

Throughout his life, the Zulu of the olden times was subjected to a discipline that 'made him honest, brave and wise, respectful toward king and neighbour ... He was a cunning and daring opponent, a keen logician and consummate diplomatist...

(Stuart 1903, p. 13 cited in Uchendu, 2008, p.1).

#### ANALYSIS OF MASCULINITY IN *THINGS FALL APART*

Let us now approach Achebe's pathfinder book, *Things Fall Apart*, on the question of masculinity. *Things Fall Apart* captures precolonial masculinities which I wish to describe here, if not classify. At the most elementary comparative analysis I will show that what contemporary Africa struggles with has a solution in traditional Africa whose ideology of matriarchy it has departed from. I also intend to look at masculinity in its original form, not only to confirm that Africa never acknowledged the hierarchy of masculinities, but also as a way to make a statement that Raewyn Connell's classification of masculinities follows Western perspective and does not apply to all societies. Simon Yarrow citing R.W. Connell's article, 'The Big picture: masculinities in recent world', writes: his [Connell's] twofold argument was that 'masculinities' may not have any meaning outside Euro/American culture, and that, since 'the agents of global domination were and are, predominantly men, the historical analysis of masculinity must be a leading theme in our understanding of the contemporary world order" (in Arnold, et al, 2011, p.126). According to Yarrow, masculinity offered a critical moment to Connell of testing European masculine types

characterised by individualism, rationality, heterosexuality and extreme violence. While I agree with Connell that there are individual as well as collective masculinities constructed by any society and that they can change throughout history which slavery and colonialism speak to loudly, I argue, however, that her notion of hierarchies of masculinities is foreign to Africa. If anything, it remains the material Western masculinity is made of and one by which we understand the organic culture of capitalism, individualism, hierarchy as reflexive of patriarchal society with its polarizing effects including sex conceived in its asymmetrical gesture of man thought as superior (active) and a woman as inferior (passive or docile) sexual partner designed to be controlled by man. While these were ground for attempting a border approach as Yarrow says, an even bolder analysis of masculinity through a shared gender identity in Africa remains under-theorised. In Africa, even the weak is accommodated in society and such a horizontal line of power sharing springs objectively from the peculiar structure of Africa's communal life. To say that "in any given society, hegemonic masculinity subordinated femininities and other masculinities, and tended to subordinate the latter by associating them with the former" as Yarrow suggests (in Arnold, et al., 2011, p.119) is very problematic and unpersuasive. Such a generalisation is too reductive to provide a perfect image of man in Africa. A descriptive book title such as this: "Male Daughters, Female Husbands' by the oft-quoted Amadiume, shows how male could be female and female male. The idea of "African women's lack of power" is, says Amadiume, "incorrect" (1987, p. 9). What is true, however, I agree with Seidler, is that masculinities do change often when in contact with dominant masculinities of other cultures "in which men put each other down" (in Arnold 2011, p. 434).

We now turn to the Achebe's book. The inner life of the story is concerned with the making of foolish mistakes by the young man who ascends to power and wealth on which he relies. The deepest psychological in-depth is displayed by characters who have sufficient wisdom to realise the full extent of Okonkwo's folly and expose him to us not as a hero that many take him to be but a villain, a bully - "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper" [...] (Achebe, 2009, p. 12).

Okonkwo's masculine violence can perhaps best be described in terms of his violence and ability to control women-folk: "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man" (Achebe, 2009, p. 33). In this respect, the main character in this story shares a lot in common with the notorious soldiers in the Great Lakes region of Africa and even more so its warlords. In this similarity, although strength and success define Okonkwo's masculinity he still differs from these soldiers who follow no ideology in their action whereas he claims his loyalty to the goddess of the Earth, Ani, despite breaking her laws. Many critics have strongly argued that Okonkwo's vision of

masculinity is not one that is shared by everyone in the clan. This is so because the features of brutality are with him than they are visible in other characters in the book, and from that point of view we need to look at the characteristics of the people Okonkwo differs from whose vision can but be a whole politics and ideology thought to be genuinely what his culture looks like.

*Things Fall Apart*, introduces us to a character who engages in a number of manly characteristics, Okonkwo. Okonkwo, we are told, was a wrestler and he “threw Amalinze the Cat, the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten” in “a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest” (Achebe, 2009, p. 3). “He was “tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose give him a very severe look” (p. 3). It is even said that ‘He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists” (p. 4). He is also the first one to bring home a human head won in a fight in an inter-tribal war. At the end of the novel, we are shown this man not afraid to take on ‘the white man’ singularly when his clan fails to fight the white man. His achievements in life are the result of a young man who never had a good start in life. His playmate reminds him that his father is *agbala*; a man too weak to be physically compared to a woman and one who has no title in the community. Unoka, for this is how they called his father, is a shaky framework of bad definition of masculinity in his son’s perception. Still worse will be Okonkwo’s judgement of him; he hated everything that his father loved: “gentleness and idleness” (Achebe, 2009, p.10).

It becomes clear that Okonkwo’s definition of masculinity grew out of a response to his father poverty. One is even tempted to say that perhaps Unoka represents a version of masculinity of an old system (not interested in private property) which was about to expire. If idleness ruined Unoka’s family, who died in debts, what could work do? Hard work promised to bring food in Okonkwo’s household. Okonkwo “was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue” (2009, p. 10). In declaring his method supreme, Okonkwo fed his family on the chief of crops; yams. Besides his qualities as a wrestler and showing prowess in two inter-tribal wars, he has also ‘taken two titles, he is a wealthy farmer, he also had three wives. As one may see, masculinity is already problematised as a point of contesting discourses strength, poverty, aspiration, converging in the life of a young man towards his expression of manhood.

I now intend to focus on less well-trod ground: the fact that strength alone does not define manhood in Africa. It has never done so. To start with let us refer to Thomas K. Hubbard who argues that: “what is interesting in historical societies is not the fact of male dominance, but precisely its gaps, discontinuities and vulnerabilities: that is, those points where masculine performance diverges the most from our stereotypical expectations are the most useful for helping us imagine” (in Arnold, et *al.*, 2011, p. 190). This argument accords well with our analysis. Okonkwo not only is in the process of masculinising himself, but also effeminising other males. For example, Okonkwo

insults a person in a meeting because he had not a title, other members rebuked him right away because they were not as quick as he to despise this man. This meant that in the Igbo culture there still was a place reserved for the weak like his own father who, though a lazy person who only played music and died in debts, he was not killed by his creditors nor was he rejected by all those he owed; he still had a place among his fellows and enjoyed life like anyone else. ‘Throughout the novel, we are reminded not only of bravery, but also of other manly characteristics that define masculinity than we had thought. This does justice to our classification that allows one to see different kind of realities defining masculinities in possible meanings: Obierika, Okonkwo’s best friend is, at once, strong and weak, courageous and gentle, and thoughtful. Obierika has more titles in the land than Okonkwo has and yet he is humble. Obierika also disapproves of Okonkwo’s killing of his adoptive son, Ikemefuna, saying, “If the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it” (Achebe, 2009, p. 41). Not participating in the sacrifice of the boy was his choice, “you know very well, Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood, and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling you a lie” (p. 41). There is a sense in which Obierika is the voice of amendment in his culture against ruthlessness. Through Obierika we see how Africans detested barbarous masculinity pushed to its utmost extremes and judged it harshly turning no blind eye on it.

Like Obierika, Uchendu, Okonkwo’s uncle, seems to live in a world very little corrupted by Okonkwo’s principles. He represents an intelligent type of masculinity which embodies the richness of the matriarchal system itself. When Okonkwo goes to Mbatha in exile after he has accidentally killed a lad in Umuofia, his uncle teaches him endurance, patience, and so on. He shows him how to be strong in weakness, a duality of life experience simplified into one thing. Such rationalisation process can be described as uniting forms of powers, ideologies and principles into one rather than keeping them into their binary parts strong vs weak, man vs woman, etc. Uchendu seems to remind Okonkwo that though success and strength are recommended, peace and love are supreme, it is these values that make “the child”, when beaten by the father to “seek sympathy in its mother’s hut” (Achebe, 2009, p.78). The recognition of the fact that the woman is very important in the society is the reason why, says Uchendu, the Igbo people give to their children the name: ‘*Nneka* – Mother is Supreme’ (p. 77) as if saying softness is not a captive but the most loved member in African society. We are also reminded that it is in Mbatha where Okonkwo’s son, Nwoye, gets converted to Christianity with the approval of Uchendu despite his father’s disowning him following the early complaints of him that there was in the boy “too much of his mother” (Achebe, 2009, p. 40) and that he, Okonkwo, had wished he became a “tough young man capable of ruling his father’s household when he was dead and gone to join the ancestors” (p. 32). But Nwoye is, to us, another type of masculinity which is as true a soft man at heart as his grandfather was. At age twelve or so, “Nwoye hated so much

“Okonkwo’s land-masculine stories of violence and bloodshed” (Achebe, 2009, p. 33) though he feigned he loved them; he “knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the [soft] stories that his mother used to tell” (p. 33). Yet another best example of masculinity is displayed by the boy Ikemefuna, whom Okonkwo kills because showing his compassion it would be interpreted as a sign of weakness. However, Okonkwo’s admiration of the sacrificial boy is enough to drive this point home: “Okonkwo was inwardly pleased as his son’s development, and he knew it was due to Ikemefuna” (Achebe, 2009, p. 32). This is because he wants his boy exorcised of his femininity by association with Ikemefuna. Like him, everybody in Okonkwo’s family is fond of the boy not because he is tough, but it has more to do with his character sharpened by his knowledge and intelligence in multi-tasks, his underside of female principle his masculinity is keyed and whose overtones it continued to emit in Nwoye even long after he was dead. As one may gather, the above masculine identities, except for Okonkwo’s, drive home the same ultimate message that the female principle is the raw material upon which black masculinity was built.

What can further be observed is that Achebe’s chapter on Okonkwo’s exile to Mbatha certainly rewrites Diop’s theory of matriarchy. Although many still want to regard this book as a myth, it is one whose narrative’s vision is leftist and one whose writer’s vision is to liberate Africa from patriarchal empire. Precisely because of this vision this myth needs to be carefully re-examined. If it has affinities with the goddess of the earth, Ani, it also has even greater one with women whose sufferings should make us all: scholars, politicians and military men, to work tirelessly on rethinking Africa’s matriarchal system which, as Diop says, “go [es] back to the very earliest days of African mentality” (Diop, 1987, p. xiii). As one reads more about Okonkwo, he finds more to disagree with him. The characteristics such as weakness, patience, forgiveness slowly take fuller feminine identities; the clearer the admiration of them by senior citizens like Uchendu, Obierika or Ogbueffi Ndulu, a man who led Umofua to war but could not do anything without his wife (Achebe, 2009, p. 42), the more obvious it becomes that the ancients disagreed with distinction between the feminine and masculine principles. Despite Okonkwo’s yearning for power, masculinity in traditional Africa had never been defined by one thing, it had more to do with a complexity of characteristics than with violence as its sole signifier. Denying women, a central place in society and exaltation of power over peace are moral faults that one can attribute to Okonkwo’s ignorance. *Things Fall Apart* is, in this sense, less as a celebration than as a strong critique of masculine violence.

Strictly speaking, Okonkwo represents the faultiness in traditional masculinity, while colonial masculinity itself cannot deny that it amounted to nothing less than the celebration of barbarism. Although Okonkwo’s role in this novel is negative, it is partly used to illuminate the dominant white masculinity itself. The excessive brutality of the coloniser, as shown here, leaves itself open to Obierika’s statement that “That man was

one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog.... (Achebe, 2009, p. 117). He is asked to shut up by a man who inherited the power to silence the questioning of others. I argue that if we look at Okonkwo's death carefully, we become aware of the significance of the historical silence imposed on black masculinity and the tension between soft black and dominant white masculinities. It is my argument that Okonkwo died as a result of shame. We are made to see a man whose masculinity was shaped by competition and success and had developed defensiveness that made him resist defeat but now he can't; he is surrounded by people who are too weak. This is why after killing the messenger he is met with a cry from his clan's men: "Why did he do it?" (Achebe, 2009, p.116). But Okonkwo knew that the world he wanted to live in no longer existed and decided to take his life.

The long-term effect of rule by terror was to make the British masculinity sacred; as Robert M. Wren observes, "in *No Longer At Ease* Achebe comments, of a later period is revealing, "To throw a white man was like unmasking an ancestral spirit" (in Irele 2009, p.530; Achebe 1960, p. 65).

This writer agrees with Achebe's conclusion of the novel: "Will you bury him like any other man" asked the Commissioner. We cannot bury him" (Achebe, 2009, p. 117) replied Obierika. The above cynical remark by Obierika is intended ridicule not only colonial masculinity but also the stupidity which Okonkwo's death testifies as is of rebels today whose killings of their own people glorify the Westerner who takes advantage of their wealth than these killings prosper them.

#### CONCLUSION

Africa has been made to believe that violence and division are part of its identity than peace: yet a return, for that matter, to democracy is a natural process for a people who have always been ruled by a female principle than it should be an effort. To this end I submit that the above discussion was intended to encourage the restructuring of masculinity and encourage the type of masculinity such as displayed by Obierika, who, despite being strong and successful chooses to use his thinking rather than his physical strength. The paper brings matriarchy back into view as opposed to the colonial imposed "discourses on patriarchy [and on matriarchy] that fill our libraries" (Gikandi, 2010, p. 296).

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